

INTERNATIONAL LONGSHORE AND WAREHOUSE UNION
PACIFIC COAST PENSIONERS ASSOCIATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
LABOR ARCHIVES OF WASHINGTON
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON LIBRARIES SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
MARY FULLER OF ILWU LOCAL 19 and ILWU LOCAL 52, PCPA

INTERVIEWEE: MARY FULLER

INTERVIEWER: HARVEY SCHWARTZ

SUBJECTS: ILWU LOCAL 19; ILWU LOCAL 52; FEMALE LONGSHOREMAN; 2002 LOCKOUT; LASHING; DISPATCHING

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[00:00:00] **HARVEY SCHWARTZ:** This is Harvey Schwartz. I'm in Long Beach, California. Today is September 18, 2017. This is part of the PCPA Oral History Project. I'm with Mary Fuller from Locals 19 and 52. Mary, can you tell me when you were born and where you were born?

[00:00:32] **MARY FULLER:** I was born in Seattle, Washington, September 18, 1952.

[00:00:40] **HARVEY:** Is today your birthday?

[00:00:41] **MARY:** Today is my birthday.

[00:00:43] **HARVEY:** Happy birthday. That's great.

[00:00:45] **MARY:** Thanks.

[00:00:45] **HARVEY:** I remember that actually from earlier today.

[00:00:47] **MARY:** Yeah. Wonderful.

[00:00:53] **HARVEY:** Where did your parents come from? Tell me something about your parents' background.

[00:00:56] **MARY:** My parents are both from Canada. They migrated down here, or came down, in 1951. I have two older sisters and an older brother who are Canadian, but they have since taken their papers out and they're U.S. citizens, and then a younger brother and sister who were born down here in the U.S. with me.

[00:01:21] **HARVEY:** How come they came down here from Canada?

[00:01:25] **MARY:** I think work opportunity. They both were in the military, the Canadian Air Force. My dad was an electronic technician and I think it was a better work opportunity down here.

[00:01:41] **HARVEY:** But if he was in the Canadian military, how could he just come down here?

[00:01:45] **MARY:** When he got out of the military, when they both got out, when they were both discharged.

[00:01:50] **HARVEY:** So, they were a military family. Were they politically involved in any way, or interested?

[00:01:54] **MARY:** I don't think so. I don't know for sure, but I don't think so.

[00:02:01] **HARVEY:** Unions at all?

[00:02:04] **MARY:** No. I believe I probably am the first in a union. Since then my brothers were in unions, and my sister was in a union, but not as strong as the ILWU.

[00:02:20] **HARVEY:** Where is it that they settled in Seattle?

[00:02:23] **MARY:** In north Seattle, in Shoreline. That's where I grew up is Shoreline.

[00:02:28] **HARVEY:** What's it like growing up in the 50s and 60s in Shoreline.

[00:02:33] **MARY:** Well . . . very white. [chuckles] There wasn't a lot of racial mix up there. Just a Leave-It-to-Beaver-type family. Went to school, came home. Dad had a piano. He used to play the piano and we'd sing around the piano. It was a very good upbringing. Six kids in the family, so we had a lot of people to play with.

[00:03:07] **HARVEY:** And your dad was doing electronics?

[00:03:09] **MARY:** Yes, he was an electronic technician.

[00:03:16] **HARVEY:** What was your schooling like?

[00:03:18] **MARY:** Well, I went to school in Shoreline there and high school, Shoreline High School. Typical public school. I graduated and went to a couple years [of] college, but never graduated college. I went to work.

[00:03:33] **HARVEY:** Where did you go to college?

[00:03:35] **MARY:** Shoreline Community College.

[00:03:40] **HARVEY:** What kind of work did you do before you came into the ILWU?

[00:03:48] **MARY:** After I graduated, I got hired by Mitsui O.S.K. Lines, and I worked for Mitsui O.S.K. Lines for about four years. I used to work directly with the Port of Seattle, the people in the Port of Seattle, and one of the bosses at the Port of Seattle, Frank Clark, was going to hire some people, and he told me, "Mary, put your application in." So, I did, and I went to work for the Port of Seattle. I think it was about eight years at the Port of Seattle, something like that, when in 1980, they opened up for women to become longshoremen.

[00:04:35] **HARVEY:** What did you do for the Port of Seattle?

[00:04:37] **MARY:** I worked in a warehouse. I worked directly with the longshoremen and with the clerks. I was the one that got all their paperwork ready for them. And I worked with Customs. I was kind of the go-between between the longshoremen and Customs or the clerks and Customs. When they had to take women in 1980, the guys—and I feel real good about this—some of the guys came to me and said, “Mary, put your application in.” So, I did, and when I got interviewed, the guy from the PMA [Pacific Maritime Association] and the guy from the union—the guy from the PMA really didn’t say anything. It was [Joe?] Weber. I don’t know if you know who Weber is. But the guy from the union, he just looked at me and he says, “Do you think you can do the job?” And all I told him is, “I’ll give it 110 percent. I’ll do everything I can.” He says, “Okay.”

[00:05:34] **HARVEY:** Who was that, do you recall?

[00:05:35] **MARY:** Bob Lindsey. I think he is deceased now. I think he’s gone.

[00:05:45] **HARVEY:** What was your first day on the job like?

[00:05:49] **MARY:** Scary. [laughing] It was scary. They kept giving us Fisher’s Flour Mill, because that was the worst job, and it was throwing 50-, 60-, 70-pound sacks. The first night after I went home, I didn’t think I was going to survive. I thought I was going to die. [chuckles] Seriously. I had muscles I didn’t even know existed. But I got myself up the next day and went back down to the hall again, and there I was at Fisher’s again the next day. You just . . . I’ve always been a stubborn person. If someone tells me I can’t do it, I’m going to do it.

[00:06:31] **HARVEY:** Did anybody tell you you couldn’t do it?

[00:06:32] **MARY:** Mm-hm. A lot of people told me I couldn’t do it.

[00:06:35] **HARVEY:** Tell us about that. Give us some detail about that.

[00:06:37] **MARY:** Well, when we first started down there, when the women first started down there, the guys didn’t want us there. They didn’t want us there. But I found out that if you put your 110 percent in, and you show that you’re really trying, those guys were great. I also learned that it’s a lot easier to drive a truck than it is to throw 50-, 60-pound sacks of flour, sugar, whatever it is, and so I taught myself how to drive a truck. Some of the guys, I don’t think ever came around, but most of them did. When they saw that the women were really putting their 110 percent in and really doing a good job, then they would. I could tell you stories about jobs that I worked with guys and the first time “No, I’m not working with a woman.” Well, we were in a warehouse and I said, “You just sit on that [bowl?] and you bring the boards to me. I’ll load them up.” I loaded them faster than he could take them and put them away. So the next night we’re there, he says, “I want her as a partner.” Because he didn’t have to get off the forklift. [laughing] And so “I want her as a partner,” that’s all you had to do was just do your job.

[00:07:54] **HARVEY:** Any particular incident that you recall? There are sometimes guys who will not come around. Do you have any stories behind that kind of experience?

[00:08:03] **MARY:** Oh, yeah. I’ve had lashing bars thrown at me. Guys just refusing to work with me and go off and do their own thing. But I’d say 99 percent of the bosses would back you up. The one time I’m thinking of, this guy, I was lashing with him and he didn’t want to work with a woman. He did not want to work with a woman, so he started throwing lashing bars. I just got down and went up in the bow of the ship, sat on a rope. The foreman came and found me and he says, “What are you doing?” I said, “Well, I’m not working in there. It’s dangerous.” He says, “What’s going on?” I told him and he says, “Okay, fine. Stay here.” He went back and told the other guy, “You’ve got the bay. You do it.” Which was really nice. A lot of the bosses were really good.

My own personal opinion is if you got in there and you were doing the job, and you didn't give anybody any grief and you just stood your own ground—I can swear like a longshoreman now, I tell you what, and nobody gave me grief. I think I was pretty well respected down there, but it's because I did my job. And I loved the guys.

[00:09:29] **HARVEY:** How long were you in Local 19?

[00:09:32] **MARY:** Seventeen years.

[00:09:36] **HARVEY:** Were you active at all in the local?

[00:09:40] **MARY:** I tried to be. I went to the meetings, but that's kind of where the hard part was. I couldn't . . . it was hard to advance myself because everything was so congested and there were so many people. I wanted to drive crane, but I couldn't even see the crane board in my lifetime down there, so that's when I transferred to checkers. I drove all the other equipment. I had some strad training, I drove truck, I did everything but I couldn't get into the crane. There was just too many people.

Then the body was starting to break down after 17 years of jumping up and down on the containers. And we did so many things that were unsafe back then that they wouldn't even tolerate now. [laughing]

[00:10:32] **HARVEY:** That's about 1997 that you retired?

[00:10:37] **MARY:** Yes.

[00:10:38] **HARVEY:** What was your favorite product to work?

[00:10:42] **MARY:** Longshoring?

[00:10:44] **HARVEY:** Yes.

[00:10:47] **MARY:** Gosh, I liked them all. Lashing was my least favorite.

[00:10:52] **HARVEY:** How come?

[00:10:53] **MARY:** Because it was heavy. The three high bars were really hard for me. The two high bars were okay and the turnbuckles, but the three high bars were hard. The best? When I first started, when I was younger, I liked working the apple ships because you were there for a week or so, and you were working with the same guys, and that's that camaraderieship that you have that we don't find so much anymore. You were working with the same guys and you knew how they worked, and it like a big family. Now, not so much.

[00:11:43] **HARVEY:** What was the worst product, the one you disliked the most?

[00:11:46] **MARY:** The lashing. I did like—I had my combination license and I drove for what they call hook transfer. It was longshoremen driving the trucks in between the piers. I got my combination license and I did that, and that was fun because we worked as a group. There were about six or seven of us that would go. That's another thing. Another story is when I went and got my combination license, and SSA signed a waiver for me—so I had never driven a truck but I passed the written test, I had my combination license. The dispatcher and the business agent at the time found out I had my combination license, so when I went in—pegged in for a job—they said, "Here, you've got this job." I says, "I've never driven over the road yet. Can I go with someone?" They said, "No, you can't. You take the job or you go home." I says, "Give me the goddamn job." I took it, and I almost blew the truck up, but I did learn how to drive. [laughing] That was fun because the guys,

we would break together. It would be like a caravan, there would be four or five of us, and we would just kind of watch out for each other.

[00:12:59] **HARVEY:** Did anybody help you, like “Here’s how you drive this thing”? Did anybody give you any lessons?

[00:13:04] **MARY:** No, I just got in myself and did it. [chuckles] I tried to teach other people how to do it, but there were some people that just mechanically couldn’t do it. In fact, when I was working for the Port of Seattle—before I quit there and before I started longshoring, I knew I was going to longshore so I had put my thing in to retire, to quit—and the chief supervisor there would tell me, “Okay, there’s a chassis in row 34, slot three. You can use that chassis.” So I’d go jump in one of the trucks at my break time or lunchtime and I’d go out and practice. So by the time I got into the union, I did know how to drive truck, but it was because of the guys down there being so good to me.

[00:14:05] **HARVEY:** What about some of the other women? What was their experience who went in with you in 1980?

[00:14:10] **MARY:** Kristi [Hagen?] and Cindy [last name?], who are here with me to this. Oh, god. Gretchen [last name?], I think Gretchen’s still working. Bobbie, and Bobbie has passed. I don’t know. There was about 12 of us that got in in 1980. We all did pretty good. And you find this in men, too, there are workers and there weren’t workers. A couple of the women would take the real easy jobs or they wouldn’t work. I just took a job and did it. But for the most part, I think the first 12 women were workers, and we were pretty well respected. I think we set the bar for the women coming behind us pretty high.

[00:15:05] **HARVEY:** When did you retire? Did you retire fairly recently?

[00:15:07] **MARY:** In 2010.

[00:15:13] **HARVEY:** Were you 62 at that time?

[00:15:15] **MARY:** No, I retired on a disability because I have two replaced hips—actually, I’ve had three replaced hips—I’ve broken my ankle, I’ve smashed fingers. The body was just falling apart.

[00:15:28] **HARVEY:** Were all these accidents on the job?

[00:15:38] **MARY:** Oh, yeah. Smashed fingers . . . well, the hips were just from wear and tear. But the ankle, smashed fingers, cuts . . . but it was the hips and the climbing. Of course, when I started, we did things that they don’t do anymore. You climb up the side of the container, you’re up on the container, they bring the can over your head. They don’t do that. You jump down from container to container, and if the guys can do it, sure, I can do it. [chuckles]

[00:16:14] **HARVEY:** How did you hurt your ankle?

[00:16:16] **MARY:** I broke it at work. I think I stepped down . . . I was driving strad at the time. I came out of the strad, and instead of coming down and turning around and coming down backwards, I was on the last step and I jumped down and it just twisted.

[00:16:40] **HARVEY:** Do you remember how you hurt your fingers?

[00:16:42] **MARY:** I got this finger smashed at Matson. I got it caught between a cone and a truck tire when they brought the container down, but I had my hand where it shouldn't have been. And I never did that again! [laughing] It didn't break it, it just smashed it in. It still . . .

[00:17:05] **HARVEY:** Still acts a little funny?

[00:17:06] **MARY:** Yeah. It's still out of shape and everything, but it works.

[00:17:09] **HARVEY:** Were you at all involved in the 2002 lockout? Do you remember the big lockout?

[00:17:20] **MARY:** Mm-hm.

[00:17:21] **HARVEY:** What was your experience of that? What did you do during the 2002 lockout?

[00:17:24] **MARY:** I remember going and picketing. My husband was alive at the time—he was also a longshoreman—Bill Fairbanks. We went down and worked the cruise ship. There was a cruise ship that came in that they had locked out, and the longshoremen foreman had a key to the cruise ship terminal, and he said, “We’re going to work this.” So we all went down—not all of us, but a bunch of us went down and worked the cruise ship for free. You can’t penalize those people going on a cruise because we have an argument.

Then I remember picketing at Pier 46, which is closer to downtown, and I was a night worker so I did the night picketing. And at 6:00 in the morning, it just amazed me, the people that went by that would honk their horns and give us the thumbs-up, or bring us donuts or coffee. There were so many people behind us. It was wonderful.

[00:18:31] **HARVEY:** Along the way, how did you get kind of a worldview with the ILWU? How did you get imbued with the union sensibility? Do you remember that? I mean is it just a job in the beginning and then you get a wider vision? How did that happen?

[00:18:51] **MARY:** When I worked for the Port of Seattle, I was in the warehouse, and where my desk was at, I had a big window that looked down into the warehouse, and I could see the guys, and I could see them working. I always sat there and said, “That’s what I want to do.” And I had no clue what a longshoreman was. I had no clue.

[00:19:14] **HARVEY:** Why did you want to be [a longshoreman] ?

[00:19:16] **MARY:** Why? Because money, guys—I was a single woman in my twenties [laughing] — and it was different. But I did learn about the union, and before I went in and started working, I went down to the Labor Temple and I took some classes. I took a class on the union and—it wasn’t on the ILWU, but they were union classes—I think kind of to broaden my view a bit, to see what a union really is.

[00:20:01] **HARVEY:** What did your parents think of your career line? Your dad was military.

[00:20:08] **MARY:** They thought it was great. I’m not sure if they thought I would make it, but they were behind me 100 percent. My mom and dad were good.

[00:20:21] **HARVEY:** When you go over to the clerks, what’s that like? What happens when you go to Local 52 after 17 years?

[00:20:28] **MARY:** Well [laughing] you’ve got to stay all day, and you get there early and you’re the last one to leave. It was fun. I enjoyed it. I worked a lot on the gates. I climbed the ladder, took my supercargo—at the very

end, I was a supercargo working everywhere. But in between that at Local 52, I was dispatcher, and that's what I was mainly at 52. I think the first couple years I worked the gates and worked the yards and everything, and then I went in for dispatching.

[00:21:02] **HARVEY:** Did you run for office to become a dispatcher?

[00:21:05] **MARY:** Yes, and you have to run every year. For that job. I must have been in there for 10, 12 years dispatching.

[00:21:17] **HARVEY:** Did you ever run for office in Local 19?

[00:21:20] **MARY:** I did but I never got in. I wanted to be a dispatcher at Local 19 also, and when they found out I was transferring to 52, the dispatchers came to me and said, "Would you like to come in and learn this?" And I said, "No, I'm going to 52," and their dispatch is different than Local 19's.

[00:21:41] **HARVEY:** Why do you think you got elected? Did you have to run more than once to get elected dispatcher?

[00:21:48] **MARY:** No, and I was the first woman dispatcher and there were a lot of guys in Local 52 that said, "We'll never have a woman dispatcher. We'll never have a woman dispatcher." And the first time, I got in. I think because of the guys I worked with, they knew what kind of job I did, and they knew that I was fair—I didn't play favorites—and that's the kind of person you need in a dispatch office. I just wanted everybody to just "Take your job and go to work. Be nice."

[00:22:25] **HARVEY:** How long were you the dispatcher?

[00:22:27] **MARY:** Oh, god. I'd have to look, but it was at least 10 years.

[00:22:39] **HARVEY:** That's most of the time you were in 52.

[00:22:41] **MARY:** Most of the time. Like I said, for maybe the first couple years. I quit dispatching about six months before I retired because I didn't want to just quit dispatching and leave them high and dry. In fact, it was probably more than six months, but I quit the dispatching and let someone else go in and learn it and do it, because I just went supercargo. And my husband had retired and he was home, so I was just kind of on my slope out.

[00:23:22] **HARVEY:** Did you help train the next person?

[00:23:25] **MARY:** I did a little bit, but we had three other dispatchers in there that were real good.

[00:23:32] **HARVEY:** When did you get married?

[00:23:38] **MARY:** Let's see . . . well, Bill and me met . . . I retired in 2010, and at that time we were together for about 28 years, but we had only been married for about five maybe. We just saw no sense in getting married. We both have families and we weren't going to have any more kids. But when he decided he wanted to retire, we got married, so when he passed, I get his pension. It would have been the same if I had gone. It was all about money. It was just security. But we just had a little tiny wedding and then a big party afterwards. [laughing]

[00:24:34] **HARVEY:** Do you have any children?

[00:24:37] **MARY:** I do. My son is a longshoreman in Seattle and my daughter-in-law is also a longshoreman in Seattle. She's been down here to LA working quite a bit—that's Bill's daughter. I have another daughter but she works for Smith Brothers Milk, she's not a longshoreman. [laughing] She's a milk lady.

[00:24:58] **HARVEY:** What happened to her?

[00:25:00] **MARY:** Well, she went her own path.

[00:25:02] **HARVEY:** Of course. How come you joined the Pacific Coast Pensioners Association?

[00:25:27] **MARY:** Because I felt I need to give back. This union has given me so much. It's not only given me an excellent job, it's given my son and excellent job, and what more can you ask for if your child is secure? You can't ask for any more. I have a beautiful house. I live on a lake. It's all because of the ILWU. And the PCPA, they do wonderful things. They do great things. It's just you need to give back.

[00:26:06] **HARVEY:** That's very nice. We're very appreciative of you sitting in with us.

[00:26:24] **MARY:** Thank you.

[00:26:28] **HARVEY:** Thank you.